# Five Supervisor Tips for Maintaining a Healthy Team During COVID and Beyond

**University of Wisconsin Stevens Point**

UW-Stevens Point faculty and staff are facing additional pressure and stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The below tips provide advice for supervisors to support their teams mental and physical wellness during this difficult time and in general.

## Communicate Openly and Honestly

While the COVID-19 crisis is an unprecedented event in modern history, the experience of managing through it is not necessarily unique (ex: 9/11 and the global financial crisis). Even if this is not the first crisis an individual has encountered while employed, they are most likely scared and wondering, "What does this mean for my job and my future?" The role of a supervisor is to project confidence and strength.

Create a strategy for how and when you will communicate with your team as the situation evolves. Navigate your conversations with care. Consider your audience, be humble, don't sugar coat, be responsible and try to remain consistent.

Your teams are comprised of people in a variety of circumstances. Your employees may be homeschooling or caring for small children while maintaining their full workload. Ask your staff if there is a convenient time for regular staff meetings, during regular naptimes or when school-aged children are on Zoom "in class." You may also have team members who are single and living in complete isolation during this remote work period. It is important to take these factors into account when communicating with your employees. It might be easy to assume that these employees "have it easier" because they are not juggling work and children, this is not necessarily the case. These employees are also going to need special attention during this time of isolation and loneliness.

Encourage your teams to "manage up." Many people think that managing up is only necessary in negotiating a raise or benefits. Now, more than ever, normalizing managing up is crucial. Your employees need the space to advocate for themselves and maintain a healthy relationship with their supervisor. Offer the space for your employees to present problems and solutions. As you pay attention to the mental health and wellness of your employees, let them look out for yours as well; we are truly in this situation together. There are several resources to help staff manage up in a virtual world.

### Additional Communication Resources

- How to Talk to Your Team When the Future is Uncertain
- How Leaders Sustain Communications in an Extended Crisis
- How to Better Support Remote Workers Who Are Single or Have Families Without Children
- How to Help Employees Work from Home with Kids
- How to Support Employees who are Working from Home with Children
- Working from Home with Kids, 5 Action Steps for Leaders, Managers, And Employees
- Action Plan for Working from Home When You're Caring for Others
- 15 Managing Up Techniques You Can Use Every Day in Student Affairs
- 10 Tips to Successfully Manage Up in a Virtual World
- How to Lead with Strength and Wisdom in Times of Crisis
- Podcast: Staying Emotionally Close in the Time of COVID-19 (Bruce Perry, MD, PHD)
- Podcast: Unlocking Us: Grief and Finding Meaning (Brene Brown and David Kessler)
- How to Overcome the Loneliness of Social Distancing
- Stay Calm & Reduce Fear During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Ask Meaningful Questions

It is easy to default to the usual "How are you doing right now?" question during these challenging times. This is a helpful question at first, it is an assumption-free signal of care. If we continue to ask this same question, we lose the opportunity to build a deeper connection.

Remember that some employees may need time to open-up about how they are dealing with working remotely and how they are dealing with their emotions and mental state. If they don't answer you right away, try making small talk or coming back to it after other topics.

As we see an increase of furloughs over the coming months, more and more of your employees will experience very difficult and scary circumstances. Meaningful communication with both furloughed employees and the employees who are not furloughed will be extremely important. Employees who are not furloughed may take on additional guilt, stress and anxiety, as their workload increases and they see their colleagues (and in some cases, friends) placed on full or partial furloughs.

| Additional Meaningful Questions Resources |
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| • [Empathy Starts with Curiosity](#) |
| • [20 Questions to Ask Instead of "How are you doing right now?"](#) |
| • [How to Support Staff Self-Care and Well-Being During COVID-19](#) |
| • [How to Cope with Coronavirus Anxiety](#) |
| • [How to Make Furloughs More Humane](#) |
| • [Furloughing Staff During COVID-19: How Leaders are Supporting Employees through Difficult Budget Decisions](#) |

## Manage Meetings

Being in meetings most of the day or all day can drain engagement and negatively impact productivity (Ewers, n.d.). As a supervisor it is important to manage your schedule as well as provide resources for your department. Some quick tips to manage your schedule include: Scheduling meetings for 25 minutes or 50 minutes instead of 30 and 60 minutes, send emails when possible instead of setting up a meeting; once a meeting is scheduled, schedule 15 minutes to a half hour "work time" into your schedule to follow-up on items from the meeting, respond to a few emails, etc., if someone else schedules the meeting which ends at the half hour or hour, ask them if its okay to have it be 25 or 55 minutes (Ewers, n.d.).

"In the office, back-to-back meetings have natural pauses between them. There is the walk down the hallway, those first few moments at the table when you wait for everyone to arrive, and the casual conversation that happens as teammates greet one another and quickly catch up. Often, we barely notice these little breathers as we move through our work week. Then we switch to remote work and realize just how much we needed them to punctuate the rat-a-tat pace of a multi-meeting day" (Spataro, 2020, para. 5).

| Additional Meeting Resources |
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| • [What it Takes to Run a Great Virtual Meeting](#) |
| • [Why Video Calls Are so Exhausting, and How to Avoid 'Zoom Fatigue'](#) |
| • [Zoom Exhaustion is Real. Here Are Six Ways to Find Balance and Stay Connected](#) |
| • [How to Keep Your Virtual Meetings Efficient and Productive](#) |

If you and your team are meeting regularly, consider scheduling meetings to end a few minutes before the end of the half or full hour. This will go a long way in mitigating burn out from back-to-back meetings.

## Continue Creating Team Culture

A healthy team culture is more important than ever. It is easy to shift to an "essentials only" mode in this new work from home culture, postponing important events and celebrations until we are all back together.

Teams need these small celebrations and team building now more than ever! Celebrate that birthday, hold a weekly coffee hour or virtual "happy" hour. Keep building team culture even when you need to build it from afar. Your team also has ideas about how to connect, ask for their ideas. "The get-togethers that help drive culture may seem challenging to pull off remotely at first, but it's worth the extra effort to keep everyone connected and moving forward" (Spataro, 2020, para. 10). Celebrating small wins has a powerful impact on employees' well-being, motivation, and output.

**Additional Team Culture Resources**
- [Why It's Important for Leaders to Recognize Small Wins](#)
- [How to Maintain Culture While Working Remotely During COVID-19](#)
- [Maintain and Strengthen Your Culture in Times of Disruption](#)
- [10 Ways to Keep Your Culture Thriving Remotely in the Face of COVID-19](#)
- [Top 15 Tips to Effectively Manage Remote Employees](#)
- [A Guide to Managing Your (Newly) Remote Workers](#)

## Create a Space for People to Disconnect

Even under normal circumstances disconnecting from work can be difficult. It is especially tough while we no longer have our normal after work routines. We are no longer leaving the office to meet friends for dinner or pick children up from childcare.

Since the onset of this pandemic, you and your team have likely been experiencing challenges with setting boundaries. It has become difficult to distinguish between weekend and weekday, days (and nights). As a supervisor, you might be sending and receiving more messages and emails "after hours" than you did in pre-COVID times. It is crucial to be rigorous about setting boundaries–this includes communicating to your team when and how you will be reachable.

**Additional Disconnect Resources**
- [Working from Home? How to Set Better Boundaries as a Leader](#)
- [Why Managers–and Their Teams–Benefit from Setting a Clear End to the Workday](#)

References:                                                   *This resource was adapted from UW-Milwaukee.*

Ewers, P. (n.d.). Back-to-Back Meetings Poison Your Productivity. Here's the Antidote. *Mindmaven* [Online]. Retrieved on May 28, 2020 from https://mindmaven.com/blog/back-to-back-meetings/

Spataro, J. (2020). 2 weeks in: What we've learned about remote work. *Microsoft* [Online]. Retrieved from https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/03/18/making-the-switch-to-remote-work-5-things-weve-learned/